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FM AMEMBASSY LA PAZ
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1886
INFO RUEHAC/AMEMBASSY ASUNCION 6412
RUEHRL/AMEMBASSY BERLIN 0108
RUEHBO/AMEMBASSY BOGOTA 3736
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA 7610
RUEHBUT/AMEMBASSY BUENOS AIRES 4858
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS 2108
RUEHCP/AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN 0202
RUEHHE/AMEMBASSY HELSINKI 0083
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA 2182
RUEHLI/AMEMBASSY LISBON 0089
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 0104
RUEHMD/AMEMBASSY MADRID 3239
RUEHME/AMEMBASSY MEXICO 1995
RUEHMN/AMEMBASSY MONTEVIDEO 4304
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO 0111
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA 0452
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 0109
RUEHQ/AMEMBASSY QUITO 4745
RUEHRO/AMEMBASSY ROME 0279
RUEHSG/AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO 9332
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM 0156
RUEHTC/AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE 0735
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO 0268
RUEHGL/AMCONSUL GUAYAQUIL 0840
RUEHRI/AMCONSUL RIO DE JANEIRO 0939
RUEHSO/AMCONSUL SAO PAULO 2113
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS
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C O N F I D E N T I A L LA PAZ 003457

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STATE FOR WHA/AND
TREASURY FOR SGOOCH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 12/21/2016

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [BL](#)

SUBJECT: MAS SEEKS TO UNDERMINE COCHABAMBA OPPOSITION

REF: LA PAZ 3354

Classified By: Ecopol Counselor Andrew Erickson for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Summary

[¶](#)1. (C) On December 14, Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa led a march attended by over 50,000 people in favor of autonomy and a two-thirds vote on constitutional articles in the pivotal department of Cochabamba. In response to the march, the Regional Workers Federation (COD) held a protest on December 19, which erupted into violence after someone threw a tear gas grenade. The COD, joined by other social organizations, vowed on December 20 to pressure the prefect to resign. The COD's planned pressure tactics against Reyes Villa seem to be a thinly-veiled MAS attempt to oust a formidable opposition leader in the "swing state" of Cochabamba. End summary.

Counter-March Erupts into Violence

[¶](#)2. (C) On December 14, Prefect of Cochabamba Manfred Reyes Villa led a march in favor of national unity, regional

autonomy, and the argument that new constitutional articles should be approved by two-thirds of constituent assembly members. More than 50,000 people participated in the march. Reyes Villa proposed holding a referendum on autonomy within sixty days. In response to the march, the Regional Workers Federation (COD) held a protest against the two-thirds vote and autonomy on December 19. The protest became violent after a tear gas grenade exploded. Protesters blamed the police for the explosion, while the police chief blamed university students. Protesters responded to the tear gas by throwing sticks and stones at the police.

MAS-Backed Social Groups Demand Prefect's Resignation

¶3. (C) The COD convened a meeting on December 20 attended by over forty social sector groups to discuss retaliatory measures against the prefect. Reyes Villa denied that he had authorized the use of tear gas against the protesters and said that the police had found dynamite in some protesters' backpacks. However, the COD vowed to pressure the prefect until he resigned, calling him a fascist oligarch. According to press reports, a Movement Towards Socialism (MAS) senator declared that MAS-affiliated sectors back the COD's decision.

Reyes Villa stated that he would not resign and that democracy would be respected. MAS support in Cochabamba is high; however, the province is divided. Reyes Villa, who was elected democratically in December 2005 under his own political party banner, also enjoys significant support -- 47 percent according to polls conducted in early December.

Comment

¶4. (C) The COD's plan to force Prefect Manfred Reyes Villa from power seems to be a thinly-veiled MAS attempt to oust a formidable opposition leader in the pivotal department of Cochabamba. The threats against Reyes Villa are reminiscent of the actions taken against La Paz' opposition Prefect Jose Luis "Pepe Lucho" Paredes earlier this month (reftel). End comment.

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